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THE GOOD TRACT.—SEE PAGE 17.

MALAN'S NARRATIVES.

THE GOOD TRACT,

AND

THE GOOD BOYS.

EDITED BY D. P. KIDDER.

New-York :

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FOR THE SUNDAY-SCHOOL UNION OF THE METHODIST EPISCOPAL
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THE GOOD TRACT.

CHAPTER I.

GOOD AND BAD TRACTS DISTINGUISHED.

EVERY one knows what a tract is. It is a little printed book, which is sold at a very low price, oftener given away, and even thrown, here and there, about the streets and roads, where those who receive it, or find it, may read the religious truths or good advice which this book contains.

This manner of instructing all classes of people is very ancient. It was in use, for example, in the earliest years of the Reformation, when some faithful Christians of Picardy, in France, as-

sembled together to read the Holy Bible, and were for this exposed to persecution, to death, and especially to be burned alive.

Then these true disciples of the Lord Jesus composed and circulated, but with difficulty, little writings which taught the way of salvation, and which the low and poor among the people could read ; for it was then impossible for them to procure and read the Bible, which was not only rare, but cost much money, almost as much as a thousand Bibles would cost now, and besides could not be kept and read secretly as well as a simple tract.

In our times, and especially for fifty years past, this method has been employed in almost all countries where faithful Churches and Christian communities are to be found ; and every

year now millions of these writings are printed and distributed for all ages and all conditions of men.

It is true also that not all tracts are good. Many of them are intended to sustain false religions and bad principles, and consequently do the greatest harm to those who read them.

And if you ask how shall a good tract be known from a bad one, this is my reply :—

A *good* tract is one which is like the Bible, which speaks of the love of Jesus, and which invites the reader to be holy, through love for God.

A *bad* tract is one which does not speak like the Bible, which says that salvation is merited by human virtues, or insinuates some false and ruinous principle.

The tracts which speak of the happi-

ness of man, as if it originated with man, and not with God, and which consequently deny the Bible, are bad. They should be avoided and detested!

The good which has been done by religious tracts cannot be estimated. A great number of families owe their prosperity and happiness to the introduction of one of these evangelical tracts; and the following anecdote is an interesting proof.

CHAPTER II.

THE FAMILY OF THE VINE-DRESSER.

THE family of a vine-dresser in the canton of Vaud, in Switzerland, was known throughout the village for being as immoral as irreligious. The father, whom we will not call by name, was a

proud and stern man, intemperate and dissolute ; and his wife, who was equally far from fearing the Lord, was what is called a gossip.

The pastor of the village had more than once attempted to awaken in the hearts of these young people sentiments of piety, but had received from them only scornful words or jests.

The family of the vine-dresser was composed of three children. The oldest, Mark, was, like his father, haughty and stubborn ; and although he was not yet fourteen years old, he already associated with gamblers and drunkards. He was therefore destitute of religion. His sister, Josephine, who was a little more than twelve years of age, manifested an interesting disposition. The wife of the pastor had taught this child, who could not help seeing that her parents were

not submissive to God. Peter, the youngest, was only ten ; but the example of his brother did him more harm than that of his sister did good.

CHAPTER III.

THE SHOOTING MATCH—THE TRACT FOUND—
ITS PERUSAL AND GOOD EFFECT.

ABOUT the last of May there was to be, at a large village not far from that of the vine-dresser, a shooting match. This was a general festival, to which all the people in the neighborhood repaired.

On the morning of this day Mark had replied with impudence to his father, who had grown angry with him, and chastised him severely, prohibiting him, besides, from going to the fête.

The father went there, and Mark, after having remained undecided for a few moments, soon resolved not to mind the prohibition, but to go also.

He profited by the absence of his mother, who had gone, as usual, to gossip with some neighbors, and, notwithstanding the representations of Josephine, left the house, and hastened through the fields and shrubbery towards the place of the celebration.

“What is that?” said he, picking up a little tract, covered with colored paper, which was lying on the path, near the opening in the hedge. “Ah! it is one of those tracts which we find everywhere. It is excellent paper for gun-wadding,” added he, putting the tract in his pocket; and he continued his way.

But when he approached the village,

where he could hear the sound of firing, playing, and dancing, he was suddenly arrested by the thought that his father, who was there, would see him, and would not fail to beat him and to drive him away before everybody ; and as he did not know where his father might be, and Peter, whom his father had taken with him, might suddenly appear and expose him, he kept himself concealed behind the hedge, without daring to go a step farther.

“I might read this book !” said he, after having in vain racked his brains for some expedient to be at the fête without being discovered. “There is nothing but nonsense in it, I know beforehand ; but it will take up my time a few moments.”

This tract was *The Happy Family* ; and Mark was so much interested in it,

that he read it through, and the latter part of it twice.

“It is singular!” said he, when he had finished his reading. “I should never have believed it possible. This Andrew and Julia were after all happier than we are, than I am especially. Ah!” added he, walking with his head down, along the hedge, “perhaps Josephine is right, and the good way may be that of which the lady tells her.

As he reflected on the narrative he had just read, he at first pursued slowly, then more rapidly, the road to his own village, and re-entered his father’s house quietly, not whistling or singing as usual.

CHAPTER IV.

CONVERSATION WITH JOSEPHINE.

“You have not been to the fête, then?” said Josephine to him.

Mark, a little ashamed. I did not dare. I was afraid of being beaten.

Josephine. It would have been better, my brother, if you had been afraid of offending God.

Mark felt himself on the point of ridiculing her, as he always did; but he remembered Andrew and Julia, and remained silent.

Josephine, kindly. Is it not true? Would it not be much better to fear God, than to offend him always?

Mark, knitting his brow. Yes, as Andrew and Julia did.

Josephine, surprised. Of what are

you speaking, Mark? Of *The Happy Family*, in which there is an Andrew and a Julia? Have you ever read that pretty story?

“Here it is!” said Mark, drawing the tract from his pocket, and presenting it to his sister.

Josephine. That is it. But where did you get it, brother? It is new. Did you buy it of the colporteur?

“Buy it!” said Mark. “I should look well spending my money in such a foolish way.

Josephine. But where did you get it, then? Who gave it to you?

Mark. I should like to have seen any one offer it to me! I would have torn it in his presence, and thrown the pieces in his face!

Josephine. So much the worse, Mark. For it is the truth of God which you

have read there ; and to tear the truth of God would be a great sin.

Mark, rudely. Well, you see I have not torn it, since the book is whole. And if you must know, I found it on the ground, near the road, beyond the shrubbery.

Josephine. Ah ! then I know where it came from. The eldest son of the pastor and some others have formed a tract society, to distribute and scatter them about.

Mark, reproachfully. Well ! why need they put them everywhere ? Can they not let people alone, without thrusting their ideas into their heads. Let them keep their religion to themselves, and let every one enjoy his own.

Josephine. Do you think, then, Mark, that Andrew and Julia did wrong in listening to their father and grandmo-

ther, and obeying the Bible, rather than to walk in the way of sinners?

Mark, softening. I did not say that. I think Andrew and Julia were in the right, but ——. Come, give me the tract; I wish to look at something in it.

Upon this Mark went out, taking the tract with him; and a few moments after, Josephine perceived him seated in the garden, behind a hedge of rose-bushes reading it.

“Where is the rogue of a Mark?” asked the vine-dresser, when he returned home in the evening, half drunk. “Perhaps he went to the village? I heard he was seen roving about there. Where is he now?”

“He has been in bed more than an hour,” replied the mother; “and he did not go to the fête any more than I did, for I saw him in the garden reading.”

“Mark reading!” resumed the father. “That is a miracle, indeed, to see him with a book,—an idler like him, who has never learned anything, and will never know anything.”

The vine-dresser’s wife remained silent, and after having put little Peter to bed, who was entirely fatigued and exhausted, she succeeded in inducing the father to go to bed too, and all was quiet in this miserable house.

Meanwhile Mark, who was not asleep when his father returned, had heard the names of rogue and idler, and had trembled all over, when he learned that he had been seen near the village.

“How lucky,” said he to himself, “that I did not go any farther! It was really God who kept me from it,” added he, ashamed of this sentiment, so new to him, but which he would not repulse.

CHAPTER V.

GOOD BEHAVIOR — SURPRISE OF PARENTS —
A BIBLE WANTED.

THE next day, to the great surprise of his father and mother, Mark rose in a good humor, replied pleasantly to his father, and when the latter commanded him to go and work in the field, Mark took his spade and set out, singing.

“What has happened to him?” asked the father. “I should not know him. What did you say to him last night, wife, to make him so good-natured?”

“I did not even speak to him,” said the woman, drily. “He has his whims, you know.”

“I hope it will last!” said the vine-dresser; and upon that he went to the tavern, to talk about the best shots.

Josephine related to the good pastor's lady the history of the little tract, and the lady advised her to go to meet Mark, when he returned from the field, and to talk to him again of what he had read.

"Is it you, sister?" said Mark, with a gay and satisfied air, as soon as he saw her. "You are very good to come to meet me."

Josephine, who had never met with such a reception before, was rejoiced; and approaching her brother, said affectionately, "I should like to talk with you a little more about Andrew and Julia."

Mark, seriously. And I—I wish I was like them.

Josephine. Do you, indeed, Mark? Have you thought so since yesterday?

Mark, still very serious. I have thought so much of it, that I am resolved

to change my conduct. Yes, Josephine, I feel that you are in the right, and that after all to possess religion is better than to ridicule it.

The conversation continued as it had commenced ; and when Mark returned, he went to embrace his mother, who was setting the table for dinner.

“What is the matter,” said she, surprised. “You are very gay, it seems to me.”

“Nothing is the matter, my good mother,” replied Mark, seriously, “only that I mean to change my conduct.”

“To change !” said little Peter, laughingly, who had just come to look at his brother.

“And you also, little one,” said Mark ; “you must become wise.”

“How amusing !” cried the child. “One would think you had suddenly

turned schoolmaster? When shall I begin?"

"We will see by-and-by," said Mark, kindly. "Meanwhile come and help me take care of the horse and cow."

"There is something in it!" said the mother, and she blushed as she thought that the change had not originated with her.

The father had returned from the inn, and had placed himself at the table, as usual, without asking a blessing. Josephine prayed inwardly, and Mark, who remembered Andrew and Julia, reddened as he took the spoon to eat his soup.

After dinner Josephine said to Mark, when they were out of doors, before the house, "It is a pity, my brother, that papa never prays before his meals!"

"He will, Josephine, he will. I never prayed, myself; but I mean to commence

soon. But how shall I? Papa will be angry, if he sees me religious."

"I do not believe it," said Josephine; "I heard him say, this morning, to mother, that he should be very glad to have you become a good boy."

Mark colored and did not reply; he returned to his labor, without being ordered to do so, and his father, astonished, said to his wife, "There is something extraordinary about Mark. I hope it will last."

"What is it to you?" replied the wife, "since you do not care to change yourself."

"And you, my poor wife," said the vine-dresser, "do you care any more than I do? I think we have not much reason to reproach one another on this subject."

"At least," said the wife, "I am not a drunkard."

“Nor I a gossip,” said the husband. “We have both of us enough evil to think of; and if Mark tries to improve, we had better not hinder him; for our example is not any too good.”

Josephine, who was sewing in an adjoining room, could not help hearing this confession of her father, and felt encouraged to strengthen Mark in his good resolutions.

She therefore went a second time to meet him, and related what had passed. “I think,” added she, “that you will do well to tell what has happened to you, and to read this tract aloud at home.”

“Not yet,” said Mark. “I am not strong enough. It is only an hour since the son of the innkeeper ridiculed me, because I told him I would not go to play ninepins with him, while I ought

to be at work. He asked me if I had become a bigot, and I did not know how to reply. But I have read this little book for the third time."

"Ah!" said Josephine, "we ought to read the Bible, and we have none."

"That is true!" said Mark, with astonishment, "I never thought of it. No, we have no Bible in the house. I am sorry for that!" added he, looking down and striking the earth with his spade.

"What shall we do, then?" asked Josephine, "for we ought to have one."

Mark said nothing, and returned pensive. From that day his conduct became more and more regular and industrious.

CHAPTER VI.

READING IN THE FAMILY—A BIBLE PURCHASED.

ABOUT a week after the first circumstance we have named, his father, who had seldom manifested any kindness towards him, said, at table, in presence of them all, "Well, Mark, tell us what has happened to you, for it is a pleasure to see how well you behave. Say, my boy, where did you get this wisdom?"

"From this little book," said Mark, drawing from his pocket the tract which he had found.

"What book is that?" said the mother, scornfully. "Is it not one of those nonsensical—?"

"Hush!" cried the father. "Since this book has done good, how can it

be nonsensical? Do we make good wine of rotten grapes?"

"But," replied the mother, sharply, "I do not wish introduced into my house these books which they scatter—."

"Well, for my part," said the vine-dresser, "I wish anything that will make our children better. Mark has worked industriously for a week past; he has not given me the least trouble; and since he says it is this book which has made him better, I will read it also myself. Read it to us, Mark. Come! we will listen. Wife! be silent, and you also, Peter. As for Josephine, I know she is all ready."

Mark commenced reading, but he could not continue; his father rose and went out, without speaking, and his mother began to clear off the table, also in silence.

But when the family were assembled together in the evening, the father said to Mark, "Continue your reading. I should like to hear the end of it."

Mark read, and when he came to what the tract says about the Bible, the vine-dresser cast his eyes on a shelf where there were a few old books, and said, "Wife, did we not have a Bible once?"

"More than fifteen years ago," replied the wife, "you changed it away for a pistol."

The vine-dresser colored, and listened, without speaking, to the rest of the tract. When it was finished, he remained silent, with his head cast down, and his hands clasped on his knees. Josephine thought this was the moment to speak of her desire to possess a Bible, and, approaching her

father, she stood beside him, without speaking.

The father perceived her, and raising his head, said to her, "What do you want, Josephine? Tell me, my child."

"Dear father," she said, "I have long desired to read the Bible. Will you please to buy me one?"

"The Bible!" exclaimed the mother. "What can you want of it at your age?"

"Wife! wife!" said the vine-dresser, impatiently; "when will you let me do what is good? Yes, my daughter," pursued he, patting Josephine's cheek, "I will buy you one to-morrow. Do you think the pastor has any to sell?"

"O yes," exclaimed Josephine; "some very large ones too."

"Well," said the father, rising and

leaving the house, "you shall have a large one."

"But," exclaimed his wife, "you do not know what it will cost."

"It will not cost as much as the wine which I shall no longer drink," replied the father with firmness.

He kept his word. The next day the Bible was bought; and the father, the very same evening, asked Mark to read a chapter aloud. This evening the inn did not see him. He did not appear there for a whole week. His friends laughed at him, and tried to entice him. He was tempted; but the thought of the Bible withheld him, and he refused.

"Are you mad?" said they. "No," replied he; "but I read the Bible now; and since it says that *drunkards cannot inherit the kingdom of heaven*,

I mean to obey it, and cease to be a drunkard."

"You see," said Josephine to Mark, as they were on their way to the church, "how good God has been to us. We have a Bible, and can read it at home!"

Mark. Have you told the son of the pastor how much good his tract has done us?

Josephine. I told his mother.

Mark. And what did she say?

Josephine. She said that God is admirable in all his ways; and that, since he has thus commenced his work in us, he will surely complete it.

Mark. Who would have said, when I went, like a rebel, to that fête, that God was then waiting to draw me to himself? But, dear Josephine, there is much to be done!

“Listen,” said Josephine : “ what God has promised he will perform. He tells us to pray in the name of the Saviour : we will do so ; and we shall soon become wiser.”

G O O D B O Y S.

Two ragged ill-looking boys were loitering before the door of a minister's house, one Sunday morning. They looked as if they wished to ask for something, but were afraid. The minister happened to see them, and, opening the window, asked what they wanted.

Boy. Sir, we are told that you sometimes give away little books, and we should like to have some.

Minister. What do you want them for? Can you read them? or do you want them to sell?

Boy. Sir, we wish to have them to read.

Minister. Do you know they are religious books?

Boy. O, sir, we dare say they will do us good.

Minister. I hope they may. Here are some, and I pray to God that he may teach you to understand them.

The minister then gave them some tracts, which they received very gladly. The same evening two other boys, well dressed and respectable in their appearance, asked to see the minister.

Minister. Well, my lads, what do you want? Tell me who you are?

Francis. Sir, my name is Francis White, and this is James Turner; we come to ask you to give us some of your good little books.

Minister. Who told you that I had any to give away?

James. Lawrence Williams told us so.

Minister. Who is Lawrence Williams?

James. He lives by the side of the river: but I assure you, sir, he is not one of our companions; we are not good-for-nothing fellows like him.

Minister. Is he a good-for-nothing fellow?

James. O yes, sir; everybody knows his character; he is a thief; he stole a knife last Saturday from his aunt.

Francis. And he gave it to the apple-woman, who sits by the bridge, for some apples. He is a sad glutton, and never so happy as when he is eating.

Minister. Are you sure that Lawrence did so?

James. Yes, sir, and it was not the first time he has done wrong; a day

never passes but he is punished for fighting, or something or other that is wrong. I once saw him get a severe lecture for quarreling and fighting. His father and mother do all they can to make him a good boy. It was only last Tuesday that they tied him to the bed-post all day ; but it is all of no use, for he is a good-for-nothing fellow, and always in mischief.

Minister. Can you tell me why Lawrence behaves in this manner ?

James. Sir, it is owing to bad company ; he is always about the streets. If he goes to school, it is only for once and away, and he plays truant for a week afterwards. He was yesterday caught robbing an orchard.

Francis. And he got a good thrashing ; the gardener gave it to him thoroughly.

James. So it is, sir ; one bad thing leads to another : for my part, I would not be a thief for all the world.

Francis. Nor I ; we should be pointed at everywhere. Whenever the boys at our school see Lawrence, they hoot after him directly.

Minister. Do they hoot after you ?

James. No, sir : we are good honest boys ; we never do wrong.

Minister. Then you are quite different from Lawrence ; but are you sure you are so much better than he is, and that you never do anything wrong ?

James considered for a minute, his conscience seemed to strike him, and he said, “ No, sir, I do not quite mean that we never do anything wrong. I mean, sir, that we always—no, sir, not quite always—in short, sir, I mean that we are not thieves, and that we

go to school regularly, and never play truant."

Minister. James, suppose your father's shop-boy were to steal some money out of the till, what would be done to him?

James. O, sir, he would soon be turned off; and, indeed, I should suppose he would be put in prison.

Minister. Most likely. But suppose he said, "I should like to take that money, and I would do so, only I should be punished for it;" now, tell me, is not he in reality a thief?

James. Why, yes, sir; he is a thief in his heart.

Minister. You are right, James; for it is a sin, in the sight of God, to wish to do wrong, as well as actually to sin openly; for God sees the heart, and looks at our secret desires and inclinations.

Francis. Yes, sir, God sees everything—in the dark as well as in the light. He knows everything.

James. And I am very sure he has seen Lawrence when he was stealing.

Minister. But, James, do you think God only looks at thieves?

James. Yes, sir, he sees everybody and everything.

Minister. Does he also see those who are proud, and liars, and swearers; those who disobey their parents and masters, the envious and the slanderers?

James understood what was meant, and remained silent.

Minister. Look at those two posts: tell me which is the best; that green one which has been lately fresh painted, or the other which looks so shabby?

James. The shabby-looking one is the best piece of wood.

Minister. Then you mean, that as that smart looking green one is worm-eaten and decayed, it is not so good as the other, though it looks so much better on the outside.

Francis. There can be no doubt about that, sir. A piece of pine which is sound and is good at heart, is much better than a piece of oak if it is rotten and decayed.

Minister. Well, Francis, consider yourself, and tell me, frankly and truly, remembering that God sees you, have you a good heart? You and James are much better dressed than Lawrence, and you are not good-for-nothing fellows, as you call it, like him; but do not trust to the outward appearance only, do not look only at the smart color painted outside, but examine what the inside really is. Tell me, are you really

good, and without blame, in the sight of God? What do you suppose God thinks of you?

Francis looked down, but said nothing; he seemed to recollect something; and, when he remembered that the eye of God was upon him, he did not feel quite so comfortable and so much at his ease as he had done just before.

Minister. Francis, you do not answer my question. Are you quite a good boy in every respect, and without blame in the sight of God?

Francis. No, sir, there is nobody who is quite good in every respect; we have all done something wrong.

Minister. And what have you done amiss: suppose you tell me at once?

Francis. Ah, sir, I have naughty thoughts, and sometimes I speak naugh-

ty words, and am in a passion now and then.

Minister. And have you never said what was false or untrue, and intended to deceive? Are not you sometimes idle, or greedy, or envious, or spiteful, and revengeful? And have you not sometimes sinned against God?

Francis. No, sir. I have never sinned against God, whatever else I may have done.

Minister. What! never? Have you never broken the Sabbath? Do you always keep holy the sacred day? Do not you sometimes forget that it is a day in which you should think about God and your souls, and not play as on other days?

James. O, sir, all our school-fellows play, sometimes, on Sundays.

Minister. But supposing all your

companions break the commandment of God, do you suppose that they are right in so doing? Remember, you are not to follow a multitude to do evil. Exod. xxiii, 2.

James. True, sir, I had forgotten that.

Minister. You see, then, that you ought not to sin against God; and remember that if you sin against others, you sin against God, for He has commanded us to love our neighbor as ourselves. Matt. xix, 19.

Francis. Yes, sir; my mother tells me not to vex my little sister, and if I should go and tease her it is very plain that I am disobedient.

Minister. Then, Francis, how can you say that you have never sinned against God, since you confess that you are sometimes in a passion? With whom

have you been angry? Was it only with your dog or the cat?

Francis. No, sir; there are several persons at home that I have sometimes been in a passion with, they are so cross to me.

Minister. I do not wonder at that, if you are only good-humored to those persons who flatter and spoil you. But you now see that you have sinned against God, so that you are a sinner before him, and need his forgiveness, as well as Lawrence, whom you have just called a good-for-nothing fellow.

James. But, sir, if you ask any persons who know us, they will give you a better character of us than of him.

Minister. What has other people's opinion of you to do with the state of your heart? Did not you tell me just now that God looks at the heart? Are

you aware that a murderer is worse than a thief?

Francis. Certainly, sir; for a thief does not kill people, at least he does not always.

James. Surely we are not murderers!

Minister. James, tell me, do you believe the Bible?

James. Yes, sir, I believe all that it tells us is true.

Minister. Then, what do you say to these words of our Lord Jesus Christ? "Whosoever shall say to his brother, Thou fool, shall be in danger of hell fire." Matt. v, 22. And remember the declaration of St. John, that "whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer." 1 John iii, 15.

James. I never attended to these words before; nobody ever showed them to me.

Minister. They are not the less true for that. God forbids all envy, hatred, malice, and all uncharitableness ; and declares that those who live therein, sin against him, and shall not inherit the kingdom of heaven. This he positively declares, and therefore I tell you that, in the sight of God, you are a sinner as well as Lawrence ; and on this account I was sorry to hear you praising yourselves, and finding fault with him in the manner you did a few minutes ago. Do you recollect what our Lord said about the man who saw the mote which was in his brother's eye, but—?

Francis. O yes, sir :—he did not perceive the beam that was in his own. I have read about it in my grandmother's great Bible with pictures.

Minister. It is, indeed, necessary that we should know our own hearts ;

and this, my children, is what I wish you to do. Do not employ yourselves in thinking so much about Lawrence and his wicked doings. You have great reason to be thankful that you have been kept from being like him in some respects ; but consider your own conduct, and you must be aware that there are many things in which you offend God. Who will have to answer for you before God ?

James. O, sir, every one must answer for himself: there can be no doubt of that.

Minister. And what will you say, James, when you are called upon to render account of the manner in which you have kept the holy law of God ? Think : you must go either to heaven or to hell : to which do you wish to go ?

James. To heaven, certainly. And

I do not talk carelessly about the day of judgment, as some people do.

Minister. My boy, do not talk about other people, but tell me about yourself. Do you think that you ought to expect to go to heaven, having broken the laws of God, having a wicked sinful heart, as you feel you have?

James. I am afraid I should not; and I see that I must not sin any more.

Minister. How will you avoid this? How will you change the inclinations of your heart?

James. I must read good books, and pray a great deal, and go regularly to public worship, and do all other things that I ought to do.

Minister. What should you do if you had splashed your nankeen trowsers?

Francis. His mother would give him a good scolding, that she would.

Minister. But would the good scolding take out the splashes ?

Francis. To be sure not.

Minister. Suppose he looked into his mother's receipt book, and read there how to take out stains ; or suppose he went to the wash-house door, and stood there all day, crying, " I have stained my trowsers ! "

James. That would not be the way to make them clean.

Minister. Then how do you suppose that merely reading good books, and repeating prayers, will change your heart ?

James. But, sir, if I do nothing that is wrong in future, will not that take away my past sins ?

Minister. James, did you ever see a chimney-sweeper, whose hands or clothes were not dirty ; can he avoid it ?

James. No, sir; not if he follows his business.

Minister. And can you, who are by nature inclined to sin, and living in the midst of temptation, suppose that you can keep yourself from it? Do not you know that your heart is inclined to sin?

James. It is true, sir, and I have four times determined never to say any naughty words, and I tied a knot in my handkerchief that I might be sure to remember it; but somehow I have forgot my resolution.

Francis. And, for my part, it is not above a month ago that I ate so many tarts that I was ill all the next day, and obliged to take physic; and I then promised, most seriously, that I would remember not to eat so many next time, but it is only three days ago I made

myself ill again in the same manner ; they tasted so sweet and nice, and looked so tempting, spread out on the old woman's table, that I could not help eating a great deal.

Minister. My boys, you think sin is sweet, and that entices you, and, as long as you delight in it, good resolutions will be of no use ; you will never keep them.

James. Then, sir, what must we do, if we cannot change our own hearts ?

Minister. James, tell me what is done when anything wants cleaning ? Do they put water by it, and merely say, It cannot wash itself ?

James. No, sir : they must get somebody to wash it.

Minister. Well then, since your heart cannot cleanse itself from its evil ways, you must look for somebody to cleanse it.

Francis. How can I do that?

Minister. Is it not written in the Bible that God cleanseth our hearts, by faith in Christ; and, that the blood of Christ cleanseth us from all sin? 1 John i, 7.

James. How can this be? I do not understand you, sir.

Minister. I will try to explain it. Suppose a man owed more money than he could pay, and was sent to prison.

Francis. My uncle is in prison for debt; I went to see him yesterday.

Minister. Suppose I was to go and pay all your uncle's debts for him, would he still be in debt to his creditors?

Francis. No, sir; and then, my poor aunt and my cousins need not work so hard as they do: and after all I am afraid they will never be able to pay his debts.

Minister. And what would have set your uncle at liberty, if I had paid his debts ?

Francis. Your money, sir.

Minister. So that it might be said, a friend's money had taken away your uncle's debts.

James. I understand you now, sir ; you mean to explain to us, that Christ has paid our debts.

Minister. Yes : he was delivered for our offenses, and that by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God ; and, being by the hands of wicked men crucified and slain, was raised again for our justification. Thus, to use the apostle Paul's expression, " He was made a curse for us : " that is, He suffered in our stead the curse of the law upon transgressors, which we could not in any other way have escaped.

Francis. Was he then punished in our stead?

Minister. I will try to explain it further to you. All men are sinners, all have sinned against God. There is not one who has kept his holy law. No one of us can cleanse himself from his sins: how then can they be taken away? Jesus Christ our Saviour, seeing that we deserved punishment for breaking this holy law, took our sins upon himself, he became answerable for them, and has himself suffered for us the punishment which we deserved.

Francis. But shall not we be punished for them too?

Minister. God has declared that whosoever believes that Christ Jesus has done and suffered this for us, and really desires to be pardoned for his sake, shall be forgiven. But mind what I am going

to say ; this must really be desired by you, in your hearts, and not merely be said by you without caring about it, and only because you are told to say so.

James. Sir, I have often heard about the Saviour, but never before heard what you have just told me.

Minister. Then what did you suppose was the reason why Christ came into the world, and was crucified ?

James. That we might be saved.

Minister. He has obtained forgiveness for those who believe in him : it does not remain to be done now. If you were to come and say, "Sir, you have paid my debts, and I will now go and pay them," you would talk nonsense, or it would be a proof that you did not believe that I had really paid them.

Francis. This is plain ; what has been already done cannot remain to be

done now. Sir, it is as if I had a great load upon my back. If somebody took it off, I should then feel quite at ease.

Minister. My dear boy, if you really believe that Christ died to take away your sins, you will feel at ease, for Christ has said, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Matt. xi, 28.

James. Then will Christ be punished for our sins instead of us?

Francis. Will he be punished, did you ask? He was punished when he was crucified.

Minister. Yes. Christ came down from heaven to save us; this was done when he was nailed to the cross. He who looks to the Saviour for pardon will find it.

Francis. But, still, will he not be afraid to die?

Minister. Why should he be afraid, since he has been saved and redeemed; and, when he dies, he will go to heaven to the Saviour?

James. But, sir, ought not I to take care not to do anything wrong?

Minister. There was once a man who had a well in his garden, and all the water that was drawn from it was dirty and good for nothing. The man said one day, "I must find out the reason of this:" he opened the well, and examined it, and found there was a great deal of dirt in the well, which nearly filled it, so that all the water which was drawn out was muddy and bad. Finding this was the case, he had the well cleaned out. James, tell me whether the water which was afterward drawn out of the well was the same as he used to have, or not.

James. It must have been better, because the well had been cleaned.

Minister. Will he find dirty water in the well, now it has been cleaned?

James. No, sir; as the well is clean, the water will be clear.

Minister. Our Saviour said, "A good man out of the good treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man out of the evil treasure of his heart bringeth forth that which is evil," (Luke vi, 45;) and that "every good tree bringeth forth good fruit." Matt. vii, 17. So, if he has been pleased to give you a new heart, he will, by the power of his Holy Spirit, cause you to think good thoughts, and to do what is good.

Francis. But supposing that any one continued to be wicked, to tell lies, and say naughty words, would Christ save him?

Minister. Tell me whether you would think the well was properly cleaned, if the water drawn from it was still dirty ?

Francis. Certainly not, sir.

Minister. And tell me, did the clear water clean the well ? Or, was the well cleaned out before the good water was found there ?

Francis. The well must have been cleaned out first.

Minister. Then observe this, my dear children. I hope you have been convinced that what proceeds out of your hearts is not good. You have found a great deal of fault with Lawrence, but have forgotten that in some respects you were as bad as he was. This was wrong ; and you have done other things which were not right in the sight of God, although you said that you never did anything wrong. You understand, I hope,

that you cannot cleanse your own hearts, and that before you can please God it is necessary that you should be pardoned by him, and have new hearts given to you. Then believe in Christ Jesus, my dear children. He has said, "Suffer little children to come unto me, and forbid them not." Mark x, 14. Confess your sins to him, and believe that he can take them away and forgive you; and that it was for this he died upon the cross.

James. But, sir, if you knew how often evil thoughts come into our minds, and how often we see and hear things which are wrong.

Minister. My dear children, God will give his Holy Spirit to those who believe in the Saviour, and the Holy Spirit will enlighten their minds, and cause them to love God. Pray, therefore, above all

things, for the Holy Spirit ; he will teach you to love what is right, and to avoid what is wrong, and will enable you to live to the praise and glory of the Saviour.

The conversation ended here ; the minister gave these lads some little tracts, the contents of which might teach them to know themselves better, not to think so highly of themselves, but to seek for true wisdom and peace, which are only to be found in the knowledge of the Saviour. He then advised them to go to Lawrence, and tell him what they had heard. They went away, asking to be allowed to come again next Sunday.

The reader will doubtless be glad to hear that this conversation produced some good effects. James has since come to the minister, and asked to be allowed to attend his Sunday-school,

“that,” as he said, “he might learn more about religion, and the way of salvation.” As for Francis, although so quick in his answers, and so ready at understanding what the minister said, he does not like to hear much about God, or to read the Bible ; but likes better to play and amuse himself with foolish things. I am afraid there are more little boys and girls like Francis, than like James ; but, my dear little readers, I hope you will try to be like the latter, and pray earnestly to God that he will make you so. “Wilt thou not from this time cry unto me, My Father, thou art the Guide of my youth ?”

THE END.





Photo. 22

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